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LETTER DATED 5 OCTOBER 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BURUNDI TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit herewith a copy of the opening statement at the press conference given to the United Nations press corps by the President of the Republic of Burundi, Mr. Pierre Buyoya, on 22 September 1998.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and of its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Gamaliel NDARUZANIYE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

New York
22 September 1998

Press conference given by the President of Burundi
on 22 September 1998

Opening statement

1. On the occasion of the fifty-third session of the United Nations General Assembly, it is gratifying to take up and comment on various questions of concern to our country, our region and our continent in an effort to inform international opinion and encourage the positive action which is necessary.

2. After having banished the spectre of genocide which threatened Burundi a little over two years ago, we have embarked on a major peace process intended to bring about a political solution on the basis of which lasting reconciliation in Burundi can be built. This peace process has two elements: an internal initiative and an external dimension.

3. The internal peace process constitutes the cornerstone of reconciliation since peace in Burundi is primarily the concern of the people of Burundi themselves. This internal initiative also constitutes the basis for external peace talks (Arusha).

4. In June 1998 the internal peace process entered a decisive phase. A joint initiative by the Government and Parliament has recently led to the signing of a significant agreement on the political platform of the transition regime, a fundamental text defining the missions of the transition institutions in terms of the fundamental questions facing the people of Burundi: peace, democracy, genocide, justice, security, victims and the economy.

5. At the conclusion of a process of internal negotiation between the Government and National Assembly (Parliament) a constitutional act on the transition was promulgated in June. This resolved the constitutional impasse, a broadly based Government has been established, and an expanded Parliament is ready to start its work.

6. Today this domestic partnership is engaged in strengthening peace in the provinces of the country while preparing for the third round of negotiations with the Burundian diaspora, which, after lengthy preparation, began at Arusha on 15 June 1998.

7. However, despite all the efforts of the people, Parliament and Government of Burundi, the illegal and unjust sanctions imposed on 31 July 1996 against Burundi represent the most dangerous threat to the peace process, reconciliation and stability in Burundi. Decided in haste, devoid of any legal, political or moral foundation, these measures are subjecting the most vulnerable segments of the population to total destitution and are undermining the peace effort. This, quite simply, is nonsensical.

8. The conditions previously set for the lifting of sanctions have all been met, despite which all kinds of pretexts have been raised. We would thus wish to urge the authors of the sanctions to assume their responsibilities, meet their commitments and end this constraint without further conditions.

9. We invite the international community to be consistent and to exert all necessary pressure in this regard. In a spirit of pragmatism we call on our partners to resume cooperation with Burundi, following the example of those who support our country. We need support from all our friends for reconstruction and the rehabilitation of victims.

10. Burundi is in the centre of a region in turmoil: the Great Lakes Region. The current conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a matter of great concern to us. We wish to recall here that Burundi is in no way involved in this war. We have no claims against the Congo. In common with other neighbouring countries, Burundi is likely to experience a negative fallout from this situation, which is of critical importance to security and the economy. The Government of Burundi continues to favour a peaceful settlement based on dialogue. It will do its utmost to preserve Burundi's national interests.

11. The economic future of the Great Lakes Region is closely linked to the ability to form viable major economic units. Yet regional integration requires stability and the restoration of security. It supposes an end to blockades and economic embargoes which, by definition, are the very negation of integration. Integration will also necessitate extirpating the ideology of genocide, the disarmament of militias, and respect for the sovereignty and independence of States.

12. Before concluding my introductory statement, I wish to emphasize yet again that Burundi has firmly embarked on the path of peace. We appeal to the international community for support for the internal partnership for peace - a precondition for the external initiative. Burundi must no longer be treated in an infantile, unjust, and inequitable manner. Support, to be effective, must come now - this is the time - this is the time to lift sanctions, and to give Burundi economic support to provide the peace process under way in our country with solid underpinnings.